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M.V.A. FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

BY

VIRGINIA PENNY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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OF MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

IN

VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled

M.V.A. Final Visual Presentation

submitted by

Virginia Penny

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Visual Arts in Visual Communication Design

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE

not retaining any works.

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14. View down ramp to section two, The Theory Applied.

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Appendix 1

Copy of exhibit script.

Introductory Panels:

a tree is a tree is a tree?

-an introduction to semiotic theory
-semiotics in the context of images
-the role of semiotics in visual communication

(Five images: scientific specimen drawing, illustration from primer, colour photo of palm trees, Renaissance family tree, and six logos: Hokkaido Bank, Yosemite curry, Canada Council, American Forestry Service, American Cooperative Living Assoc. and Nelson publishers)

This exhibition has been created by Virginia Penny as part of the requirements for the Master of Visual Arts degree. It is also, however, intended to be of general interest. The material presented here is necessarily a simplification of semiotic theory.

The partial support of this project
by the Alberta Museums Association
is gratefully acknowledged.

Why an exhibition?

Compared to a written thesis, an exhibition allows the viewer a a more involving experience. The organization of objects and ideas in three dimensions, using tools such as space and scale, leads to more intense involvement on the part of the viewer.

(Photo mural of tree as backdrop)

Why trees?

Trees provide a rich source of images for this project as they have long been a universal subject for imagery. The tree has been used symbolically, recorded scientifically, and depicted in art.

The subject of these images has been restricted to trees so that similarities and differences in their meaning are more apparent.

Section One:

An introduction to semiotic theory and its application to communication with images.

Defining terms

Semiotics has its own terminology. Some of these terms have different meanings in other contexts, so it is important that their meaning within semiotics is understood.

Semiotics

Semiotics is a theory of communication. It was first developed as a distinct discipline by linguists and philosophers early in this century. It has since been applied to many fields, from anthropology to zoology.

Semiotics concerns the process of encoding meaning in a message, the codes used, the role of context, and the different levels of meaning and how they operate together.

Semiotics is an affirmation of the diversity and richness of

communication. It facilitates our understanding of the communication process without distorting or impoverishing it. This is, of course, a delicate procedure and one that may have better intentions than results.

(Colour photo of autumn forest)

An act of communication

Semiotics can be applied to all **acts of communication.** An act of communication refers to *anything from which meaning is taken.*

Autumn leaves can communicate. The message "winter is coming" is quite unintentional on the part of trees, yet we may take this meaning from the falling leaves.

(Crumpled paper with 'tree' written on it)

A communication

A communication refers to all aspects of an act of communication. **Message** refers to the perceived content of a communication. The message is the word "tree" on the paper to the right. The paper itself, including the written message, is the communication.

(enlarged type from E.M.Forster's *Howard's End*)

Verbal communication

The most obvious vehicle for communication is language, both spoken and written.

Language was the initial subject of semiotics. Semiotics was developed by linguists and philosophers as a means of understanding the problem of meaning in language. It was soon realized that these same ideas could be applied to other means of communication.

From *Howard's End* by E.M. Forster, 1910.

(Annual report diagram with trees as background)

Visual communication

Graphic designers are concerned with **visual communication.** This can be **written language in all its forms** and/or **images.** Designers are, by definition, involved with **intentional communications.** They mediate between the originator and the receiver, or viewer.

('Tree' written in Forestiere ornamental typeface)

This ornamental typeface blurs the usual division between image and language.

Images are defined here as visual representations that carry a message for the viewer.

While images are the main focus here, the whole of a communication must be addressed. The relationship of an image to the other elements of a communication is an integral part of semiotic analysis.

(Poster from Massin, *Letter and Image*)

This Japanese poster in support of reforestation uses the character for "tree" to create the image of a forested hillside. This visual pun shows the close relation between written language and image.

Poster by Ryuichi Yamashiro.

(Two examples of rebuses)

Rebuses

Rebuses act as neither images nor words. They are peculiar combinations of both.

The rebus above was produced in France in 1791 and has the Revolution as its topic. The caption reads; "Warning to honest people; the best of three is nothing."

The lower rebus is a Bird Equation by Irving Wasserman.

(Map which uses tree images as cartographic symbols)

Map of Russia
1955
University Map Collection
University of Alberta

Images can have precise meanings. Each tree image on this map represents a type of terrain. Learning the meaning of such a visual system's components is similar to learning a language.

Read images?

Images are often referred to in semiotics as **texts that can be read.** This reinforces the idea that images are effective and powerful carriers of meaning. This is not in opposition to seeing; it emphasizes the discerning of meaning in images rather than the simple sensory experience of viewing them.

(Engraving of large tree from *Flora and Sylva*)

'Reading images' is perceiving meaning in images. Perception here is not only the physical action of light on the retina, but also how we invest clues/meaning/significance in the things around us.

(Ad for Coladina rum)

Semiotics provides a means for us to analyse and discuss not only the explicit or denoted message of a communication, but also implied meanings or connotations.

(Large scale map of British rurual area showing individual trees)

This map uses a conventional symbol system.

Semiotics gives us analytical tools that are useful for all forms of visual communication. The persuasive functions of advertisements and the systematic conventions of map legends are equally valid subjects of analysis.

(Diagrams from F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*)

Signs

A **sign** is the basic unit of meaning.

A sign has been defined as:
"something. . . which stands in place of something which is absent."

> Charles Peirce, ca. 1900
> one of the founders of modern semiotics

The linguistic sign

Ferdinand de Saussure, another early semiotician, used the diagram on the right to explain the nature of a linguistic sign.

(Three images: diagram of conifer, diagram line in random arrangement and photo of conofer in cartoon 'bubble')

Image as sign

These few lines signify not only a tree,

but a coniferous tree. When dealing with visual communication the signifiers consist of the marks which make a meaningful unit. The signified is our understanding of these marks.

A viewer often invests meaning in minimal information, and **reads significance** into what she sees.

(Parks Canada brochure)

The simple tree shape on this brochure is part of a fairly complex process of signification. This shape is an abstracted representation of nature.The brochure's colour reinforces this meaning. The style of type and its arrangement is modern and efficient looking. This collection of signs implies that Parks Canada is an efficient, progressive, nature-oriented institution. The whole is as persuasive as it is informative.

(Southwood car dealer decal)

This logo plays upon the meaning of a triangle. The word becomes a visual puzzle. This projects a sense of inventiveness and uniqueness onto Southwood. In contrast, the choice of colour, typeface and material fits this decal firmly into its particular context as a 'typical' North American car dealer. Originality and convention are blended for a convincing image.

(Ad for furniture with large tree in room)

"A sign is anything that could be a lie."
Umberto Eco, 1973

This tableau first existed in the mind of an art director. It is a fiction created to impress. Yet as a photo it has a certain believability. Signs are not reality but rather they represent reality. **Reality mediated.**

(Double page spread from *Metropolitan Home*)

This magazine layout presents a new cottage in California. Although these photos are not outright "lies", photographic techniques have been used to amplify the desired impression. The feeling of monumentality is reinforced by the low camera viewpoint and the use of a wide angle lens. There are no people in these pictures as they would give the interiors a human scale, and show up the exaggeration.

(Diagram showing traingular relationship of signifier, signified and referent)

Referents

The **referent** is what is **referred to by the sign**.
The tree that you might actually sit under on a sunny afternoon is the referent for the sign "tree."

This diagram shows the relationship of

signifier/signified/referent. Note there is a direct, although weak, relationship between the signifier and the referent.

(Real acorn next to drawn acorn)

The real acorn on the left is the referent for the drawing on the right.

The real acorn could also be a sign with perhaps "autumn harvest" for its signified. Noticing layers and multiplicity of meaning in signs is a result of semiotic analysis. These meanings affect our understanding, however, whether we notice them or not.

(Ad for whiskey that uses acorn and oak tree images)

This advertisement uses an acorn as a sign for a container of great ideas. This meaning is the signified, while a real acorn is the referent.

(Photo of Norfolk pine next to actual tree)

This pine tree is the referent for the photo. When we look at the photo we do not reconstruct the real tree. We accept the image or signifier for what it is.

On the other hand, the signified for this photo could be: primitive tree species, indoor plants, or photographic art. For now it is simply an example of semiotics. We require a more complete context before this image can be more fully read.

(Drawing of tree and dog each labelled 'This is a tree')

Iconic Signs

Iconicity concerns the degree a sign resembles its referent. Most images share a visual resemblance with the thing they refer to. Such signs are considered **iconic.**

(Tree, arbre, Baum and Chinese character for tree)

Language is not iconic

In language the relationship between signifier and signified is usually arbitrary. This is why each language can have its own term for the same thing.

Saussure wrote that "every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behaviour...on convention....it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gesture that obliges one to use them."

Our use of images for communication straddles both functions. Images are used by convention and also at times because of their "intrinsic value" due to their iconicity. Thus images are not as arbitrary a sign system as language.

(Reproduction of Byzantine icon)

Iconicity vs. icons

Do not confuse this use of the word *'icon'* with the art historical term. The Byzantine icon "reproduced a prototype, a pre-existing image which acted as its referent."

The thing referred to by an *'art icon'* was itself an image. This allowed for increasing stylization and abstraction as the icon was again and again reproduced.

('Trees' written in semaphore)

Codes

The system which relates a class of signifiers to a class of signifieds is called a code. A viewer's understanding of the signs in an image is similar to understanding a code.

The codes examined by semioticians are not, however, as easily deciphered as semaphore or Morse code. Their meaning is continually evolving. It is affected by context and by what the viewer brings with her. For these reasons, it is fruitless to attempt a lexicography of all visual codes.

(Legend from forestry chart)

A simple code

A legend such as this is an example of the coded nature of signs.

(Photo of sticker on car)

Do you know the code?

What does this image of a tree signify? Is it a souvenir from a national park? Is it the insignia for a service club? A particular school or institution? Does it have religious significance? Is it a national symbol? Is it more than one of these?

Searching for meaning makes us more aware of the process of signification. This is a Cedar of Lebanon, national emblem for that country.

(Article from the *Globe and Mail* on Japanese election campaign)

Text and subtext

The text of a message is its denoted meaning. The subtext is the connotation. This connoted meaning is not always acknowledged, particularly in visual communication. It can thus be a powerful yet unnoticed means of communication.

The central figure in this photo is waving sacred boughs. You might not realize this without the

caption, yet this does not make it a poor choice of illustration.

The real meaning of this photo is found in its subtext: the inscrutable Japanese, their cultural practices and their adaptations of Western traditions.

Each of the following **signs reinforce this subtext:** the lack of emphasis on the action, the abrupt cropping of figures, the distortion from the wide angle lens, the juxtaposition of business suits with traditional costume.

(Cartoon from *New Yorker*)

Two possible messages

Intentional messages such as those created by designers always have two users of a code: the encoder and the decoder. The decoder, or viewer, may not find the meaning intended by the encoder. If the decoder is satisfied with the meaning she finds then this is *de facto* the communication. In a semiotic analysis there is only meaning, not right or wrong meaning.

This cartoon works on this possible discrepancy of messages. The resort manager used the parlance of the tourist trade. The guest is dismayed that this description is not accurate in its details.

(Heartfield 'Nazi Christmas tree' as poster and same image framed as art)

Associative meaning

This image has the dangers of fascism and Fascism's effect on normally beneficial institutions as its signified. This meaning results from referring to things outside the given communication. The tree, its religious significance, its twisted shape and the Swastika-shaped stand are signifiers for the signifieds: natural beauty, Christian celebration, artificial distortion and Nazism.

Contextual meaning

Framed and matted, this image assumes the code of an historic work of art. The same image used in a poster has a political context. Changes in context change the meaning of individual signs. The meaning of a communication is the sum of signs not the meaning of each sign in isolation.

(Photograph of menorah)

What does this mean to you?

We can analyze a communication according to its contemporary meaning at any given time or we can analyze it as it evolves. A semiotician sees both types of analysis as valid. As design must usually work with a contemporary audience and its codes; the designer focusses on contemporary meanings.

Contemporary analysis

This candlestick might simply be an interesting decorative object. Or it might be seen as a symbol of the Jewish religion. It might remind us of Hannukah and the Festival of Light. As a symbol of Jewishness it might also bring other cultural or geopolitical matters to mind.

This type of analysis looks at meaning as it exists contmeporarily: what is meant at one time, in a given context, to a given viewer.

(Photo of historic menorah)

Evolutionary analysis

Or, we can look at the menorah and the historical development of its form. Consider its etymology. Its form is derived from a tree with seven branches. It was a representation of the sacred Tree of Life. The seven lamps were said to symbolize the 'seven eyes of the Lord,' seven being a holy number. Its design is specified in*Genesis,* as it was told to Moses. The original menorah was kept in the Temple in Jerusalem until it was stolen by invaders. Later, replica menorahs were made and kept lit in temples.

This type of analysis looks at meaning as it has evolved over time. This approach is used in iconological studies of art. It is valuable for a correct historic analysis, but it is not necessarily better than contemporary analysis.

Hannukiahs
Private collection

These candelabra are similar to the menorah. They have nine candles rather than seven as they are used to celebrate Hannukah, the Festival of Lights. The ninth candle is used to light the other eight over eight days. The holiday commemorates light as a symbol of faith.

One of these hannukiah has a shape reminiscent of the the sacred tree motif of the menorah. The other, with its ninth candle intact, has the image of a menorah engraved in its centre.

(The following copy presented on mirror)

The viewer

Communication from a semiotic perspective focusses on the role of the receiver, the viewer. The concern is not with what an image should mean or could mean. The interest is in communication as it actually occurs. This process of signification requires a viewer to complete it.

"All art is at once surface and symbol....
It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors."
Oscar Wilde, 1891

Section Two:

Two environments using identical or similar images of trees to show how our approach to images changes with changes in context.

The Theory Applied

When we discuss the process of communication, we usually remove the object of our study from its functional setting. We change our attitudes towards an image that is under inspection. We examine it carefully, more aware of its intrinsic qualities. At the same time we neglect the effect of its usual context, its intended function and our own expectations, on its communicative value.

In order to counteract this effect, two environments have been recreated. They allow us to consider and compare just how images communicate in a given context. Even so, these environments mimic reality: they can only approach authenticity.

Consider these questions:

How does the context of an image affect its meaning?

Are similar images found in the two environments or other areas of the exhibit? If so, how does their significance or meaning vary?

Are there particular codes used? What effect does this perceived code have on your understanding?

Do particular formal qualities of images have their own significance? Would this change with a change in context or function?

What type of viewer or environment-user is implied by each environment? How do you know?

Script for art gallery environment that was part of section two.

ART IN CRAFT

A SAMPLER OF TREES

Our culture can be characterized as one saturated by images. There has been a steady growth in the quantity and diversity of images since the advent of printing 500 years ago. This growth has exploded in the twentieth century. Images are now generated by the press, television, advertising of all kinds. They appear on clothes, walls, in books, movies, magazines. We live in a society where our experience is largely informed by representations, by signs.

This was not always so. One hundred years ago images were largely the product of crafts. Because their production was time-consuming and required skill, they were limited in number.

In this exhibit we see images that are the results of the efforts of such crafts people working intimately with their chosen medium. This intimacy joined with a clear vision can transform these examples of craft into art.

Brer Rabbit
William Morris, 1882
original chintz
Historic Costume & Textile
Collection
University of Alberta

This 'chintz' is an example of the craft of William Morris. Morris formed his own furnishings

company for the design and production of materials for use in decoration.

Poems
by Oliver Goldsmith and Robert Parnell
with engravings by Thomas Bewick, 1804
Bruce Peel Special Collections Library
University of Alberta

Bewick was an artist/scientist who wanted to use his skill to record the appearance of nature. He refined the technique of wood-engraving as a means of achieving this.

The Seasons
by Thomson
with engravings by Thomas Bewick, 1805
Bruce Peel Special Collections Library
University of Alberta

Bewick soon became known as an adept illustrator of books and was commissioned to do wood-engravings by a range of publishers.

Lake of the Woods
Walter J. Phillips, ca 1931
colour woodcut
University Collections
University of Alberta

Phillips used a technique very similar to that of the Japanese ukiyo-e prints. In 1926 Phillips wrote *The Technique of Colour Woodcut* in which he detailed the techniques he had used.

Rushing River, Lake of the Woods
Walter J. Phillips
wood-engraving, ca 1931
University Collections
University of Alberta

This is an example of Phillips' work as a wood-engraver. Note how the character of the image changes with the change in technique. Phillips was a craftsman who was deeply involved in the process of artmaking.

CHINTZ

AND THE TRADE IN DESIGNS

Historically, chintz refers to hand-painted cottons produced in certain regions of India. These fabric designs were based on 'a many flowered tree' consisting of a main curving stalk from which various ornate flowers branched out.

This many flowered tree motif was originally thought to have significance in Indian culture. Research has now shown that this design was based on imagery that migrated from Persia and the Orient through trade and was then modified for the European export market. These colourful, ornate designs were well-suited to the European desire for the exotic and the delightful of the Far East.

The chintz motif has proved to be long-lived. This exhibit shows some of the roots of this tradition and how this design still has currency 400 years later.

Source: *The Origins of Chintz* by John Irwin and Katherine Brett, 1970

Antique Chintzes
Coromandel Coast, India
eighteenth century
photographic reproductions

These are typical examples of chintz that was produced for trade with England. The makers of chintz were members of a conservative guild,

whose techniques and designs were stable over several hundred years.

The design was painted on the cloth using mordants (metal-based substances) which reacted with subsequent dyeing to produce colour. Thus the finished cloth had the feel of a dyed fabric, while the designs had the variation and intricacy of painted motifs.

Contemporary Chintzes

These chintzes have been mass-produced using modern printing technology. These designs demonstrate that the traditional patterns continue to be valued for their colour and buoyancy in contemporary interiors.

Chintz is now a generic term used for a variety of printed cottons. Even glazed cotton dyed a solid colour is referred to as chintz. This association

resulted from the glazing used on traditional chintzes to protect their surface.

Batik Pants
Northeast Coast of Java
late nineteenth century
Historic Clothing and Textile
Collection
University of Alberta

The design of this batik is based on the many-flowered-tree motif found in chintzes. The chintz design migrated to Java through trade, just as it had been earlier developed through trade in India. The technique of batik has modified the character of the design, yet it is still interesting and appropriate.

WILLIAM MORRIS

AND THE REVIVAL OF CRAFT

William Morris was a British poet, artist and polemicist who was active during the second half of the nineteenth century. He energetically promoted a return to simpler values and was the founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This movement had a profound effect on the development of design and the applied arts during the first years of our century.

Displayed here are some wallpapers and chintzes originally designed by Morris. He researched indigenous forms of decoration and through his own furnishings company he revived these traditions. His handprinted designs have in turn become the model for many contemporary fabrics and coverings and some are still produced commercially.

These coverings have Medieval decoration as their model. Morris believed "the continuous growth of curved lines" was the central discovery of Gothic decoration. He felt that a sound underlying structure was necessary for successful design. Morris used natural subjects, familiar in the English countryside, for his designs. Tree forms, exemplary for their growth and branching, were common subjects.

Source: *William Morris Wallpapers and Chintzes* by Fiona Clark, 1973.

Willow
William Morris, 1874
modern version of wallpaper design

This pattern is one of Morris's simplest designs. The flatness and evenness of the leaves define the wall's surface, while at the same time giving it a texture and interest.

Indian
William Morris, ca 1868-70
modern version of wallpaper design

This design takes up "the continuous growth of curved lines" so successfully employed in Indian chintzes and reinterprets this motif. This design shows Morris's familiarity with traditional Indian chintzes, an example of his interest in other cultures.

Poppy
William Morris, 1881
modern version of wallpaper design

This wallpaper diverges from the tree motif, and uses flowers for its subject. Morris believed that models for designs should come from nature, particularly the native, familiar plants of common experience.

Morris believed that meaning was an important factor in design. He wrote of the importance of "those natural forms which are at once most familiar and most delightful to us, as well from association as from beauty."

Bird and Anemone
William Morris, 1882
modern version of chintz design

This design was used for both wallpaper and chintz. It is an example of Morris's interest in combining geometric structure wuth organic form.

Flora and Sylva
by William Robinson
British periodical, 1903-05

This impressive book was one of a series issued by William Robinson in support of his ideas for the natural or wild garden. These gardens were based

on well-spaced trees and shrubs, and the use of perennials and bulbs planted in natural groups and 'drifts', rather than the formal parterres or carpet bedding popular in Victorian England. Although there was no obvious connection, the influence of William Morris can be felt in both the philosophy and the actual design of this book.

Robinson was originally a writer on gardening for *The Times* of London. He developed his ideas on 'naturalizing' the garden there and then moved on to promote his ideas full-time. He fostered an interest in the cottage gardens of the English countryside, both for their interest of design and for the dependable, well-acclimatized perennials that were grown there.

Collected Writings of William Morris
24 volumes, 1915
London

The illustrations in these books show examples of Morris's work at Kelmscott Press, the interior of his home at Hammersmith and a page of type in one of his custom made typefaces for Kelmscott. The look, and especially the feel of these books, reflects the value Morris placed on traditions and craftsmanship.

Love is Enough
by William Morris
London, 1873

This book has the original binding designed by Morris. Apart from this cover, Morris's book designs did not flourish until the 1890's and the founding of Kelmscott Press.

IMAGES OUT OF WOOD

The woodcut is one of the oldest printing techniques used for images. The image is carved in relief on a plank of wood and then printed. Also shown here are

several examples of the colour woodcut. This technique was perfected in Japan. A 'key block' of the drawing's outline was first carved. Then from proofs of this image, colour blocks for each separate colour were carefully cut and registered.

Wood-engraving was a technical innovation used by Thomas Bewick at the turn of the nineteenth century. A conventional woodcut plank was turned on its end and then carved on the end-grain of the wood. This allowed for much finer detail in the image and a sturdy block that lasted through many impressions.

The carving was done with tools used for engraving metal, thus the name wood-engraving. However, the image was printed by the relief method just as woodcuts and lead type are printed. This allowed for a crispness and contrast not to be found in engraved metal prints and also made it a perfect companion to lead type in books.

Examples of woodcuts and wood-engravings are shown here in both original and facsimile versions.

Crabtree
Anonymous, ca 1750
woodcut reproduction

This print shows a typical woodcut produced as a popular print during the eighteenth century.

Tree of Knowledge
Anonymous, 1771
woodcut reproduction

This print illustrated a spelling book. It is an example of the simple woodcuts used widely for

book illustration from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Cutting the Cherry Tree
Anonymous, ca 1800
woodcut reproduction

This woodcut is another example of the simple book illustrations produced this using this technique.

A Tailpiece
Thomas Bewick, ca 1800
wood-engraving reproduction

This print clearly shows the style developed by Bewick. Tailpieces such as this were used to fill spaces such as those at the end of chapters. Bewick liked to work a short narrative into each one. Note the man's predicament in this small picture.

The Old Oak Tree
after Thomas Bewick, ca 1800
wood-engraving reproduction

Wood-engravings, following Bewick's style, became a popular type of illustration during the nineteenth century.

Tree and Burin
Eric Gill, 1921
wood-engraving reproduction

This image was produced as the identity for the Society of Wood-Engravers in London. Eric Gill was a stone carver, typeface designer and wood-engraver whose philosophy was much influenced by William Morris. Like Morris, Gill wrote many tracts promoting his views on art and life.

Churchyard
G. Brender a Brandis, 1981
wood-engraving reproduction

This is a wood-engraving by a contemporary Canadian artist. The qualities afforded by the wood-engraving still attract artists to this medium.

Section Three:

Examples of tree images from common experience accompanied by short semiotic analyses of their meaning.

Meaning in Visual Communication

The main value of semiotics for visual communication design is that it allows the designer to acknowledge the meaningfulness of all components of a design. Semiotics gives the designer principles by which she can analyse the results of design decisions and predict their effect on the act of communication. It is this change in attitude towards the communication process that must be stressed.

In this section many different examples of visual communication are presented, along with notes on how these examples operate semiotically. Exhaustive analyses would be inappropriate in an exhibition. Instead, the emphasis has been put on variety.

(Christmas tree poster)

The sum of signs

This poster's shape refers to a Christmas tree.Its colour and sheen also have significance. Their bright, gleaming qualities signify specialness, as does the script typeface. All of these work together to give a feeling of 'quality' that reflects on the event advertised.

(ad with helicopters and trees)

Point of view as a sign

In this image bare trees provide an object for the helicopters' surveillance. The trees seem insubstantial from this perspective. Their colour is strangely similar to army greys. We are placed in our own helicopter, we too hover over the trees. A strong sense of point of view can draw the viewer into the scene.The viewer completes the image. This involvement can strengthen the force of the communication.

(4 geometric, abstract logos based on tree images)

Geometric images as signs

Abstracted and precise logos such as these now

signify modern, efficient corporations. By using such a design, an enterprise can transfer this progressive image on themselves.

(craftsy identity for garden shop)

The handmade as a sign

This identity uses personal, folksy qualities. This style signifies that we will find what's right for us, what suits us as individuals, in this shop.

(New Yorker cover with pastel drawing of oak tree)

Drawing as a sign

The obvious handmade nature of this image makes it a personal evocation of autumn. We do not confuse this image with reality. The colouring used here is a peculiar choice for autumn - it adds to the personal, unique qualities conveyed by this image.

(Map with forestry symbols)

Iconicity

The iconic nature of visual signs is useful in cases such as this. The tree symbols remind us of forestry,

making it easier to assimilate that they represent logging operations.

(Guerlain ad with grainy photo)

The significance of photographic qualities

The lack of focus,the grainy quality and the muted colour of this photo in combination with the lighting and subject matter, give it an other-worldly, 'paradise' connotation. The tree covered in spring blossoms reinforces this analogy. All of these meanings are transferred to the perfume by association.

(Klein ad in sepia tone)

The alchemy of signs

This product is marketed solely on the basis of a collection of signs each full of meaning, but with no obvious connection between them and the product.

The model's rough outfit with tears and holes, the isolated location, and restrained colour all signify authenticity. This is not an outfit for display; it signifies a way of life. The unbuttoned blouse, the stagey pose - clutching to the gnarled branches of dead trees, the dynamic composition and lighting all signify excitement. The message is one of adventure

and exhiliration, not romance. This combination of the authentic with the exciting is engrossing even if it is not logical.

(Baby trees ad)

A code for involvement

This image uses nurturing and caring as signifieds for an industrial lobby group. The close-up, eye level viewpoint involves the viewer in the care of these plants. Our participation makes this a more effective communication. We may forget that it is only an illusion.

(botanic illustration)

Creating a code

This botanic drawing is meant to accurately portray the characteristics of a given plant and thus aid our understanding of plants. A style of scientific drawing has developed which is detailed yet avoids the idiosyncracies of individual specimens.

(Smith and Hawken notice)

Borrowing the code

This notice borrows the style of botanic illustration. This company acquires the stamp of a scientific, careful concern whose aim is to aid the horticultural interest of their customer rather than profit.

(camouflage cloth and camouflage in news article)

Evolving meanings

Historically, the camouflage pattern was created to mimic the dappled shade in a forest. The splash-shapes disguise the outline of the object. It is still used for this purpose but it has taken on new meaning. It is now a sign of combat: the macho costume of the fighter.

These men are more symbol than record. Their camouflage fatigues label them combat-hardened soldiers. Adolfo Calero could have been photographed in a variety of poses or settings, but this pose among 'his men' conveys the correct reckless, tough image.

(two parks brochures)

The international style as a sign

These two brochures are interestingly similar, although they come from widely separated parts of the world. They share a code of formal qualities that is now considered 'informative looking': sans serif type, slightly abstracted image, restrained colour. This international style for information design, based on the Modernist aesthetic, is now a convention used to signify modern, progressive institutions.

(Potlatch annual report cover)

The naturalness of industry

This cover eulogizes the forestry industry. Rather than emphasize the destruction of the environment, the emphasis is put on the intimate relation of worker to environment. This man moves to the rhythm of nature.

The high quality of this photograph and the use of a visually sophisticated composition implies a sophistication for Potlatch as a firm.

(Landsat photos)

Technology provides new codes

You might not recognize these images as trees, yet they are actually informative images of trees. These are examples of landsat photographs of forest which allow trained users to note species, development and other features of forests.

New forms of image are often developed for their informational value, but they then take on meaning for the general public. Developments in methods of representation such as this give designers new codes of images to work with.

(Blue willow plate)

Culture provides codes

Blue willow pattern dishes are familiar enough that this image has its own significance. For the knowledgeable it might represent the peculiar combination of East and West that resulted from trade during the last 300 years. For a wider audience this image has a traditional, domestic and reassuring significance that explains its continuing popularity.

(Halftone pmt of boab tree)

The characteristics of a medium become signs

The half-tone dots which make up this image have their own meaning. Traditionally newspapers and tabloids have used coarse methods of reproduction. The resulting formal qualities now signify blunt, hardnosed reportage when enlarged and even when removed from a news context.

(Goya poster)

Historic forms as significant

This poster is not about trees. Goya has made a parallel between dismembered bodies and dismembered trees. This image is about man's cruel, destructive nature.

The use of a framing device and the formal, traditional type arrangement saves us from having to confront the content of this image and allows us to consider it simply as one example of an artist's work.

(Architecture lecture series poster)

Knowing your audience's code

This poster has a specific audience. The tree/temple signifies the paradox of nature and artifice, a concern

of contemporary architects. This makes the content appropriate. Formal qualities such as the colour, the 'keystone' motif and the overall composition make this poster formally appropriate as well.

(Crabtree & Evelyn wrapping paper and brochure)

The value of tradition

This logo has a play on the firm's name as its inspiration, but the formal qualities, including the use of traditional woodcut technique and the 'primitive,' decorative forms lend the firm a sense of tradition and craftsmanship that allows them to charge very high prices.

(Photo of Maryland oak tree)

Form reinforces content

This is a photo of the Wye Oak, an historic landmark in Maryland. The dramatic photographic technique used for this image (wide angle lens, saturation of colour) give this tree an appearance appropriate to its historic stature.

(Two baltzan furniture sale ads)

Two codes

This ad series brings together a conventional concept with a coded style. The palm represents summer, the spruce winter: these are traditional connotations. The style used is a pastiche of the trendy. This image combines tradition with trendiness.

(BC forest products double page spread)

Precision as a sign

This double page spread presents precision at several levels. The 'tools of the trade' look technical and precise. The man is performing a precise task. The photographic and printing quality is excellent - another example of a commitment to exactness.

This connection between high quality image and high performance company has been of great monetary value to graphic designers.

(Camp of beverly hills ad)

The fantasy of signs

We feel we know this product well, even if we have never heard of it. The palm tree graphic, the Vuarnet-type sunglasses, the beach sand and

especially the tiny reflection of the 'fun couple' fill us in. Once connected with the words "Beverly Hills" we know this must be a 'truly exciting' product.

(The Band lp record cover)

Metaphoric signs

This typeface works as a metaphor. Its qualities are transferred to the music group by association.

(Abitibi-Price annual report cover)

Visual puns

The similarities of trees, sheets of paper, paper rolls and pie charts are played with in this image. This approach to visual concept generation gives designs a witty quality that can be effective. Visual puns manipulate the meaning of images - mixing these up to create a hybrid.

(Domtar annual report double page spread)

The sum of several signs

These images act as a sum: nature plus industry. The environment is beautiful, but so is industry. Through juxtaposition of landscape and semi-trailer, forest

Image as text

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance fairly complex devices mixing image and text were common among the educated. These devices had a precise known meaning much like that of a motto.

This printer's mark shows an olive tree with branches cut joined with the phrase "do not be proud." This is a reference to the importance of spreading knowledge.

(gae aulenti 2x spread)

Reading attributes

The olive tree which frames the architect, Gae Aulenti, has significance beyond its formal aptness. This woman is presented surrounded by her attributes: family, wealth, professional achievement and the olive tree, symbolic of her homeland, Italy.

(potlatch 2x spread)

Diversity of form and of content

This layout presents diverse information both as text and image that explains 'interesting facts about trees.' In concert with the diversity of information is

and wood chips, an inevitability is implied without any rational basis.

(BCFP Annual Report 1975 cover)

Good idea, wrong code

This cover image is pretty. The shape, colour and texture all work together. Repetition creates a decorative effect. However these attributes project the wrong image. The visual code of handicrafts has been used, rather than that of progressive, mechanized industry. This cover would not evoke confidence in this company among investors.

The cover is made of bleached softwood kraft pulp actually produced by BCFP. Its choice as cover paper is interesting in theory but confusing in practice.

(Design Odyssey poster)

The open text

In this design a collection of forms have been selected for their significance. The passport stamp, the emblems for different places including a palm tree for L.A., the hand as sign for the designer with its gesture of openness, the excellent quality photography and printing signifying an overriding

commitment to excellence. There is enough here for the viewer to work with - not just to derive one meaning but variations and inflexions. This image is open to interpretation.

(Winter 2x spread)

New codes

This design has problems; legibility of type being most prominent, yet it is interesting as an example of borrowing and synthesising codes. The photos' shape and size resemble snapshots. The background texture evokes a feeling of craft as much as it does winter. Environmental awareness is seen here developing its own aesthetic and thus its own code.

(Orion cover)

The rhetorical image

This image uses the trope of metonymy. An attribute (bare trees) represents the whole (winter). The attraction of this image, however, lies in its beauty. The simple composition and restrained colour reinforces the trees' bareness. Form reinforces concept.

(Noli altum)

the use of diverse forms of imagery: realistic, diagrammatic, photographic, antique and even satellite views.

(Miami vice credits)

The visual for content

The credits for Miami Vice open with a pan shot of palm trees against the sun. It quickly moves to other images, providing the 'essential Miami'. This television show is more noted for its ambience than for its careful scripts. They rely on the visual for content as much as the verbal.

(weeping willow tombstone)

Old codes

The weeping willow has long been a conventional symbol for mourning. In contrast, codes developed now tend to be much more fluid - changing constantly with new media, new fashions, new world events.

(Forces 2x spread)

The image of conservation

This double page spread from an alternative energy magazine brings nature and technology together. It is not clear that these pages show parts of the same image, but it is clear that they were to be seen as one.

The rich, black printing is attractive, but it maintains the sober sense of cost-consciousness that is appropriate for a conservation-oriented industry.

(architectural drawings from design quarterly)

Making function apparent

Tree symbols have been developed by architects and landscape architects for use on plans. Their style is similar to that of botanic drawings, however, they are more symbolic than informative.

(Chintz fabric swatch and ad for chintz from mag.)

The look of savoir faire

The origins of chintz have been discussed earlier. This advertisement sees chintz as contemporarily meaningful. It now represents a certain *savoir faire* decorating style, that is highly regarded in magazines such as *Architectural Digest*.

(palms on beach)

Text subtext

The palm tree has long been a symbol of the tropics. Now it has a sub-text of tanning, relaxing, holidaying, having fun. The crudest depiction carries the possibility of escape.

(Bewick engravings)

Form becomes content

The wood-engraving technique is now associated with fine illustration work. Thomas Bewick was not interested in its meaningfulness when he developed the technique, only in its allowance for greater detail. For Bewick meaning was to be found in the subjects portrayed. This content is still important, however, in our culture with its multiplicity of image-making techniques and styles, the formal qualities of the wood-engraving carry meaning as well.

(Allan Edson painting - Sheep and Shepherds)

Signs of art

This painting uses the traditional idioms of art. It is not challenging. It is reassuring and meaningful for an audience not comfortable with art that rejects conventions.

(William Morrris wrapping paper)

Setting standards

This wrapping paper has a tastefulness and feeling of tradition. Cognoscenti might recognize it as a reproduction of Morris wallpaper - emphasizing its Arts and Crafts tradition.

(Flamingo wrapping paper)

Defining the user

The purpose of this wrapping paper is mostly decorative, however, it has an important communicational value as well. It selects the giver/receiver as part of a defined group. It says something about *who* they are.

(stamp)

Context

Even though this stamp seems tinier on this panel than it might on an envelope; it now has certain aesthetic qualities that might be overlooked when routinely used. When we lift an image from its context we affect its meaning.

(CFS newspaper)

Conflicting signals

This masthead for a paper produced as promotion for the forestry industry is a hodge podge of forms. The old-fashioned tree with the contemporary, aggressive typeface, the insignia with its futurist look, the handwritten *Forestry*, the inexplicable designs underlining the title, the green colour which stands for forest but looks washed out. Here signs are used with no clear grasp of their meaning.